



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

GIUSEPPE VERDI

By ALGERNON ST. JOHN-BRENON

AS the toilers of the city of New York make their daily journey from that part of the town that is consecrated to homes, to that which is devoted to struggle, they pass a statue.

It is prominently and honorably placed, and nearly every one that goes by it is perfectly familiar with the name and repute of the extraordinary man it commemorates.

The figure is that of an Italian, garbed in the stern commonplace of modern costume. About him are grouped some smaller sculptures, representing certain of the characters in the operas he has written. There is, for instance, an Abyssinian princess who, as far as the ordinary public is concerned, is the one person in Egyptian story, actual or imaginative, that can challenge the popularity of the royal personage who discovered the leader of a nation lying amid reeds and Nilotic mud.

Her name is Aida.

The writing on the pediment of the statue is something more than laconic. It runs: "Giuseppe Verdi."

No further explanation is given or required. It is as if you had written on another monument and beneath another figure the unstudied words: "Charles Dickens." Such short and simple descriptions are annals in themselves.

When Byron heard that his poems had been discussed in Cincinnati with approval, he said: "This is indeed fame, to be read on the banks of the Ohio." Verdi in this particular regard has outstripped Byron. This is indeed fame that a memorial to a musician, born in an obscure village of the Duchy of Parma, should be erected on the banks of the Hudson.

Now, I venture to say that for thousands who know the names of Tannhäuser, Siegfried, and Hans Sachs, and the supreme music connected with them, there are hundreds of thousands of all ranks, intelligences and classes, who know the names and the heroes and heroines grouped about this effigy of Verdi's. As to the quality of the celebrities of the two men, Verdi and Wagner, there can well be discussion, but very little about the quantity. The reason for this is not far to seek. It is to be found, originally, in the startling differences of mental and artistic disposition between the two writers, differences so

irreconcilable that even thoughtful comparison is ineffective. One can merely attempt vaguely to gauge and measure the abyss.

Verdi and Wagner were born, indeed, both in the same year. They followed the same calling. Both were dramatic musicians practically to the exclusion of all other branches of their vocation. Both were saturated with the spirit and the experience of the theatre. Both pursued their vocations with impulse, ardor, and self-dedication. Both became the salient, indeed the proverbial representatives of the art of modern operatic composition. They became such well within the period of their allotted days. Their life-suns set amid the radiance of their own glories. So far did the careers of these two men run parallel. But they never met. Their natural temper of mind, and the contrasted trend of their imaginative faculties lay as another Alps between them.

Wagner as a poet and composer is intellectual, philosophical, with the large view of the antique dramatist. He deals in the sublime.

Upon Olympus Ossa; leafy Pelion
On Ossa would he pile, a stair to Heaven.
(Homer, *Od.* XI. 305 to 307).

He rides the thunder storms. He speaks lightning. He crushes us by the urgent weight of his emotional force. But as his energy and dominance are almost tyrannical, and as his conceptions are now vast, now metaphysical, he appals the simple understanding of the folk. The people, as such, are palpably afraid of him.

The disposition of Verdi was entirely dissimilar.

He made no attempt to deal with the element of the sublime, which has been defined as that quality which makes humanity think the better of itself and would assure our fancy a larger empire. He never tried to soar so high. He was the opera composer of the people, as he was the child of the people.

Browning tells us in a noble poem, one to which we recur the more often, and with the soberer and the more meditative pleasure, the older we grow, of a certain Cleon. This Cleon had won the greenest and freshest laurels in all realms of creative artistic achievement, and his soul unsatisfied had begun to beat against its mortal bars. Vaunting that his was the "epic on the hundred plates of gold," he goes on to say, apparently with a greater swell of natural pride:

And also mine the little chant,
So sure to rise from every fishing bark,
When lights at prow, the seamen haul their nets.

This is not quite the celebrity that Wagner has earned or sought to earn. The German fisherman does not hum a few bars from "Tristan und Isolde" as he draws up his nets. The Bavarian carter does not urge his horses along to the rhythms of "The Ride of the Valkyries." But it is just this rather simple universality that is the emphatic feature of the musical reputation of Verdi. He has not written epics; but he has scattered song and lavished melodies upon the lap of earth, and earth with a smile has sung them back.

His lot has been diversified almost to the point of the fantastic. He is part of the musical regime of the tavern, and the temple. He is sung in the vaudeville theatres, to strange phrases, sometimes Bacchanalian, sometimes erotic with the eros of the gutters. He is twisted into sentimental hymns. He has become part of the varied repertory of the squiffer or concertina which, otherwise fickle and forgetful, is constant in its affection to him alone. The Salvation Army uses him as grace abounding to the chief of sinners. Yet this is not all. Night after night the fashion, and the intelligence of great capitals, the dowager and the pink-sashed bud, the enthusiast and the cynic, the mob and the intellectual Brahmin flock to the Opera to hear his works. Even more than this, those who are the most delicate and fastidious in their tastes, musical and literary, find perfect satisfaction in his last two works. In other words, Verdi has something for everybody.

His popularity has been sneered at as a popularity of the barrel-organ. Well and good. But the real question is: "How did so much of Verdi get to the barrel-organ, and stay there for two generations, and how did he pass from the style of 'Il Trovatore' to the style of 'Falstaff'?"

II

One morning nearly a hundred years ago, the celebration of Mass was proceeding in the Church of Roncole near Busseto. Roncole was a hamlet in the Duchy of Parma and its obscure situation and humble pursuits are indicated by its name. It means Pruning Hooks.

The celebrant of the Mass was a priest whose memory survives, as if ironically, by virtue of the incident to be related. The altar boy, who was called Beppino, an affectionate Italian diminutive, was the silent, unobtrusive, homekeeping child of two villagers, keepers of a general shop. Beppino had attracted a passing notice from the neighboring peasants by the deep interest which he

showed in the performances of wandering fiddlers and wayside minstrels. One of these had observed the peculiar fascination that music exercised on the child, and coming into the store had advised the father to make his son a musician.

On the morning of which I speak, the boy was serving at Mass, but in reality was devoting more attention to the strains of the organ than to the performance of the details of the liturgy. Slowly the beauty of the music overmastered his lively fancy, invading a spirit singled out to be a recipient of its whole enchantment. He passed into that state of ecstasy, of mental transfiguration, experienced, as we have ample warrant, by many a boy of highly imaginative and artistic susceptibility. We remember Arthur Stanley, captivated by the majestic pathos of a passage of Homer, bursting into tears, unmindful of the amazement of the coarse young barbarians of Rugby. We remember how, in an exquisite poem of Wordsworth, when the earliest stars were moving along the hills, and the cliffs and islands of Windermere were glimmering in the twilight, a spell wove itself about another boy.

So it was with this Beppino.

Again and again the priest asked the rapt and inspired child for the cruets. Losing his patience and his Christianity for the time being, the cleric finally shook the ministrant with such force that Beppino lost his balance, fell and rolled down the altar steps, and lay awhile stunned and bruised. Suffering and humiliated the little Verdi made his way home. His parents asked him what had happened. He made the answer: "Let me study music." He said nothing about the blow.

He had been through startling experiences that morning, one in the moral plane and the other in the rudely physical. But young as he was, it was the subjective one that had made the deeper impression on him. Thus the child was once more the father of the man.

The strongest tendency to impersonality was always a dominant trait in Giuseppe Verdi's character. We notice this in the event and outcome of this the first precious trial and valuable ordeal of his young life. Those familiar with the annals of his career could cite a hundred instances of the same quality of impersonality, wholesome in itself, and very often, though not always, an accompaniment of a large and generous artistic spirit. It is sufficient to cite the names of Shakespeare, and the three tragic poets of Athens.

This apocalypse and its brutal awakening were the first crises of Verdi's career. After this fantastic combination of

incident, he was never the same. His natural taciturnity and love of seclusion turned into moodiness and melancholia, and he made the uniform response to all the anxious questions of his parents: "Let me study music." His request was not refused. Destiny was fighting on his side.

But in spite of the amiable resolutions of the Fates, the actual education of Verdi for many years was desultory, to a certain extent empirical, and certainly the reverse of academic. I am judging of course by modern standards.

He received his first lessons in music from Baistrocchi, the organist of his village church. The quality of the instruction is not hard to divine, and at twelve years of age Verdi had learned all Baistrocchi could teach him, and had taken the place of his master in the organ loft. The question of a general education also became pressing. There was no school in the village of Pruning Hooks. Verdi was sent therefore to Busseto, which was a metropolis to Roncole, to learn reading and writing. He was put to board with a cobbler, to whom his parents paid six cents a day. One cannot imagine a situation more sordid or destructive. This is the sort of poverty that does not stimulate but numbs and kills. But Busseto was in its way a musical centre, and the talents of the child attracted the notice of Antonio Barezzi, a prosperous wholesale merchant who was the philharmonic leader in Busseto, and of Provesi, the organist of the Cathedral, whose delight it was to compose small operas and perform them in a smaller theatre to the great complacency of the locality. The patronage and friendship of Barezzi was something more than comprehensive. Barezzi, who to his honor recognized the promise of the youth from the first, freed Verdi from the desperate surroundings of a cobbler's hovel, and gave him a position in his well-ordered counting-house. He put a modern piano at his disposal. He provided him with a music-master. He introduced him to congenial surroundings. He secured him a scholarship enabling him to study in Milan, and he supplemented that grant with another from his own resources. And so when, at the age of nineteen, Verdi started for Milan, that voracious metropolis of Italian musical adventure, to enter the Conservatory, he was not only well supplied with Barezzi's money but was also in love with Barezzi's daughter. Naturally enough Barezzi, all Busseto and Verdi himself anticipated nothing at Milan other than a blast of trumpets and fall of the fortress exceeding in swiftness that of Jericho. He presented himself before the examining board of the Conservatory. He was tested in composition and in piano playing. He was summarily rejected.

This repulse cut Verdi to the heart. To the end of his life he could not remember it without pain. He felt like Gladstone when Oxford refused to return him to Parliament. It is unprofitable to engage in the controversy that has been raised about this rejection. But it is not true that the examiner Francesco Basily and his colleagues failed to discover a trace of ability in the youth who, a few years afterwards, became the boast of Italy. Far otherwise. They criticised his piano playing severely, saying that his faults were such that, at his age, they could not be easily corrected; a judgment which we must accept. But they declared unanimously, if academically, that it was clear from the compositions presented that, if the candidate would apply himself to the study of counterpoint, he would be able to control and direct the musical creative fancy which he had proved he possessed, and to succeed "with applause." Furthermore, Verdi was in his twentieth year and had long passed the age of admission.

He had nothing to do but to have recourse to a private teacher, one Lavigna.

When it became time for him to gather in the material fruit of his studies, he had to undergo the usual struggle and the customary disappointments. He left Milan, and buried himself in Busseto. He left Busseto and buried himself in Milan. Having achieved nothing substantial in music, and not to all appearances being on the verge of achieving anything, he took the audacious step characteristic of the burning impatience and strong faith of ardent youth: he married Margherita Barezzi. He was only twenty-three. The modern piano had done its work. Some months after his marriage he met his old friend, the gifted lyric poet, Temistocle Solera. Verdi had resolved to devote himself to dramatic music. Masini, an operatic director, who had formed his own opinion of Verdi's talents, practically commissioned Verdi to write an opera, giving him a libretto of his own fashioning.

But the libretto was so utterly stupid and incoherent, that Verdi did not dare compose it. He handed it to Solera and begged him to patch it up. Verdi's first opera was produced at the Teatro alla Scala on the 17th of November, 1839. Its name is strongly suggestive of the type of romance prevailing at the period. It was called, "Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio."

More than half a century later, the thirtieth and last opera was produced in the same theatre. It was called "Falstaff." Something valid and important in the history of dramatic music is shadowed in the difference between the names of the two operas

It is not quite within the scope of this essay to furnish either a biography or a complete review of all Verdi's operas. But something must be said about "Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio," because it was his first opera, and because it preceded "Nabucco" and "Ernani" by just a few years, and because the actual debuts of a great artist have their peculiar interest. The critical reception of the work was such as to justify an opinion of recent biographers running to the effect that the success of the work was equivocal. The reviewer, Monaldi, found no inspiration in the work, or as he put it, "its composer had not as yet experienced one of those moments of creative tumult and imaginative ecstasy" and the rest of it. We know the tedious dialect. The critic Checchi regretted as a calamity the fact that the signs of inspiration were but scant and fugitive, and that the bars that indicate originality were to be counted on the fingers. But intelligences whose foresight and shrewdness have been justified by the event were also watching Verdi's opera. Bermiani, the critic of "La Moda" attended cautiously on the fourth night. He noticed that the public was warming to the work. Encouraged, or perhaps prompted by this, he rebuked his colleagues in words which those who by virtue of some accident or other are in the position of public judges should engrave upon their hearts. "Instead," he wrote, "of instilling courage into the beginner, the reviewers had done their best to smother the fire of his enthusiasm and to rob him of his illusions. They had chided the young eagle on his first flight for a lack of assurance that may have been the result of prudence." "Do not terrorise," he apostrophizes, "him with your yells." Bermiani anticipated a famous remark of Pinero's.

He goes on to say that Verdi had followed no specific style, but had formed one all his own and that he sought to make an alliance between poetry and music, note and idea.

Another observer was Giovanni Ricordi, a master of the concrete. This publisher had been in earlier life a copyist and an operatic prompter. Perfectly satisfied with the success of the work and able to read between the lines, he bought "Oberto" for four hundred dollars, and commissioned Verdi to write three more operas.

It was decided that the first of them should have a comic subject and Verdi began "Un Giorno di Regno." Stars of peculiar malignity fought in their course against him during the composition of this work. He was prostrated by illness. He was persecuted by creditors. He underwent the hideous humiliation of the pawnshop. First, one child, then a second died within a few days of each

other and both of a disease that baffled the physicians. It was not given to man to write effervescently in conditions such as these. "Un Giorno di Regno" was produced. Public opinion was expectant and receptive. It was disappointed. This time opinion was unanimous. The comedy in music was a disaster. But Verdi was too strong and too self-confident to be crushed. Nineteen months later, his "Nabucco" was produced. "Nabucco" was to Verdi what "Atalanta in Calydon" was to Swinburne. It made him celebrated, and celebrated for those things that are for ever associated with his name, the freshness and independence of his musical ideas, and the warmth, passion, and directness of his melody.

We must now pass on to the consideration of the methods, the mental habits, and some of the personal characteristics of the man, with special regard to those that most nearly affect the present generation of his admirers.

III

Giuseppe Verdi has had no Boswell, and few intimates. There was in his character an element of reserve and almost Roman severity that terrified the idler and the flatterer. He had that capacity for living in his own circle of artistic and literary interest that is the evidence of a strong and self-reliant nature. Boito has established this. Eugenio Checchi once wrote to him, asking for some anecdotes of Verdi. He received this answer:

The life of our master has been so quiet for so many years, so devoted to his studies, and to home, that there is no crop of bizarre anecdotes or curious little events. There is this much piquancy in his life, that there is nothing piquant to be related.

The period that extended from the date of the completion of "Aida" to the end was one devoted largely to studies of all kinds, to reading, to reflection on the thoughts and affairs of men. He always insisted on literary culture as part of the equipment of the young composer. So with him the silent years that passed between the production of "Aida" and "Otello," broken only by the Manzoni Requiem, were years of mental development, of preparation for that new style of composition, the germ of which was in himself, and which he himself was determined to bring to flower. Such is the explanation given by Victor Maurel, of that which the world called the laziness, or at least the unproductiveness of old age. It cannot be gainsaid, and it throws a flood of light on the nature of the man, on the dignity of his isolation.

The same authority, in considering Verdi's mental and personal aspects in which the public is not apt to regard him, says that in the disposition of Verdi there was much of the humanitarian idealism of Tolstoi. But his humanitarianism did not waste itself in sentimental splashes. It was rational, poetical and self-controlled. He disliked careless and impulsive charity, but a large part of his handsome fortune went to the permanent relief of the old and broken, the humble wrecks of his profession, and in large legacies to other foundations. No one will quite understand Verdi, the man, unless he realizes the strong tinge of intellectual austerity that informs his habit of thought and attitude towards life. To use a French phrase, his character was square, not round. I need hardly remind my readers that I am not now speaking about his music, but am speaking in general terms of the man's nature.

In artistic matters this quality showed itself in an absolute devotion to principles and in an obedience to them which he practiced himself, exacted ruthlessly from others, and made the test of the value of his interpretants. At the same time, he recognized the claims and encouraged the play of an artist's personality, once that artist showed his respect for the main idea and principle of interpretation that Verdi had laid down or implied.

When Victor Maurel first studied "Rigoletto" before performing in Italy, he was perplexed as what to do with the cabaletta "Si vendetta tremenda" at the end of the second act. As every one knows, Verdi has used in "Rigoletto," at various dramatic crises, a phrase verbal and musical, referring to the curse which Monterone had laid upon the Duke of Mantua and Rigoletto. The idea of this curse is so closely woven into the fabric of the opera that Verdi thought at one time of calling it "La Maledizione" (The Curse) instead of "Rigoletto."

In the scene to which I have reference, the drama has reached its climax. Rigoletto has discovered the fate of his daughter. He has folded her to his breast, a crushed and broken flower. At this crisis, Monterone, who is being led to prison, passes by and turns to a picture of the Duke. "I have cursed thee in vain," he cries, "for neither the lightning nor the sword hath riven thy heart. Yea, thou still livest on in happiness, oh, Duke."

Then comes the famous dramatic device, which Aristotle has classified as the "Reversal of the Situation." Rigoletto, formerly among those whom Monterone had cursed, finds himself, by virtue of the sarcasm of events, with Monterone among the cursers. "No, old man," he cries to one who hates him, "thou errest,

thou shalt have thy avenger—ME!” But if there is a Reversal of the Situation here in the drama, there is none in the music, which lapses into a lilting, tripping melody of no emotional significance. Maurel, studying the part for the first time, realized at once the dramatic importance of this scene, and the ineptitude of the music. He felt that the words, “*Si vendetta tremenda*” should be sung with the voice of a lion. He determined to make a bold alteration, without, however, changing a word or a note. He did make, however, an effective change in the rhythm; and then was able to sing the cabaletta with tragic fervor. The house rose at him, passionately excited by the episode as they had never been before.

Maurel knew that sooner or later he would have to thrash the matter out with Verdi himself, and offered to sing the cabaletta with his rhythmic alteration in a drawing room for Verdi himself to judge. Verdi refused, giving as a reason that which is axiomatic among all those who understand the theatre: “You can never judge of a theatrical effect by experimenting with it in a room.” He came to the theatre himself.

He saw Maurel. He gave his complete approval to the change. “You have done something psychological, Maurel,” said he. Then he shook his head gravely. “When *Rigoletto* was written,” he went on, “our singers had nothing—well, psychological in them.” The alteration, to use the dialect of the singers, is now traditional. I have told this story in full detail, to illustrate my remark about Verdi’s adherence to artistic principle, and his flexibility in the matter of an individual interpretation that developed the ideas of his operas.

Towards scenic humbug and vocal trickery, as towards incompetence he was merciless, and both aroused in him a feeling of personal dislike.

The severity of which I speak showed itself in many ways. Those who have attended rehearsals conducted by him at the Scala speak of the cathedral-like and somewhat terrifying silence of Verdi’s presence, of how matters would go on well enough until the words, “*Vous n’avez pas compris*,” spoken sternly and coldly would come out of the darkness. Verdi had no respect for reputations as such. Twice he uttered this phrase to Edouard de Reszke at the rehearsal of the revival of “*Simon Boccanegra*” and at the third time he stopped the rehearsal and would have withdrawn the work.

In all business matters, he showed that unquestioned sign of a well-balanced nature, a clear-headed insistence upon his

rights and dues. And he regarded popular favor, and good box office receipts as a vital element in the general success of a work. He was always solicitous as to the amount of support his operas were attracting.

Once after Victor Maurel had been on tour in Italy presenting several of Verdi's works, he went, on returning to Milan to see Verdi, and began to tell him how well the "Forza del Destino" had done, and how admirably the singers had executed this and that. Verdi soon interrupted him with, "And the receipts?" In his enthusiasm, Maurel ignored the interruption and plunged into a further description of the value of the operas given, of the effect they had made in various places, of the eulogies of the critics and so on. Again Verdi interrupted him, "And the receipts?" Under stern compulsion, Maurel detailed to Verdi the receipts of each opera. They were more than encouraging. Verdi slapped him on the back and exclaimed: "Ah, well, splendid! Now let us talk of art."

IV

Yet in spite of its austerity, sternness, and practical element, Verdi's was a sensitive nature. Sensitiveness to exterior and interior impressions is the essential and distinctive quality of an artist. It was the public display of it that was alien to his sturdy and well-regulated disposition. He was as finely and delicately wrought as a poet should be. His "spirit," in Shakespeare's noble phrase, was invariably to be "finely touched to fine issues." But he was the reverse of that which, in the slang of the chorus girl, is called temperamental. Nor could he have ever found, like Byron, happiness in screaming out that he was unhappy.

But if he was stung he would wince; if he was pricked he would bleed. This we know, but know only from his private letters.

The French composer, Jules Massenet, came to Milan in 1878 to conduct a festival performance of his "Le Roi de Lahore."

Verdi received from a friend a bundle of newspapers referring to the incident. He read the letters and wrote as follows:

Among these journals there was one that said some hard things. There was talk of intrigues and small cabals. I do not know whether this is true nor do I want to know. But I know that all this stir and uproar about an opera, all these eulogies and excitements make me think of the past, that past which the aged always praise, when without any preliminary notice, without so to speak knowing anybody, I, too, presented my nose to the public. If I were applauded I said, or did

not say, thanks; if I were hissed, I said, "We'll meet again." This may not have been very beautiful, but there was dignity in it.

There is something in one of the newspapers that has given me a hearty laugh. It suggests that a stone should be put in the Scala with this inscription: "In the year 1879 there came here a foreign composer who was sumptuously entertained. He was given a dinner at which the Mayor and the Prefect were present. In 1872 a certain Verdi came here in person to put on 'Aida'. No one even offered him a glass of water."

Speaking of the reception of "Aida" he says:

See how I was treated by the press, throughout the year in which I took so much pains, labored so hard and spent so much money. The censure of the critics was stupid. Their eulogies were worse still—nowhere an artistic or lofty idea. There was not one who succeeded in penetrating my intentions. There were blunders and follies everywhere, and then at the bottom of all a sort of spite and grudge against me, as if I had committed a crime in writing "Aida" and having it properly performed. No one cared to emphasize the material fact of a performance and a *mise-en-scène* of an unusual order. There was no one to say, "Dog, I thank you!" And you know on what terms I parted with the Mayor and management.

Was Verdi nearly sixty, and did he not know that dislike and spite (or part of the others) are the natural by-products of success?

He was rehearsing "Otello" in person at the same time that Mme. Patti was singing at the Scala. One morning he found that some of his artists were missing and that the rehearsal could not proceed. In matters of theatre discipline he was inexorable, and all present were wondering as to what form his anger would take. He sent to inquire what had become of his artists. After awhile the hesitating answer was given him, that some of them were at Mme. Patti's rehearsal. Maurel relates the story. The old man made a gesture of pained surrender to Mme. Patti's exaction, saying, "Mme. Patti is a woman and everything should be done for her. Let her take all my artists." This was said in a quiet tone, but one which made it clear that he was hurt, not at the mere inconvenience of a lost rehearsal, and not at the small injury to his pride, but at Mme. Patti's selfish forgetfulness of his great age and physical sufferings.

Here I may append something in a lighter vein. The name of Franchetti, the composer of "Germania" and "Cristoforo Colombo" is not unknown in America. The libretto of "La Tosca" was submitted to him by its authors, Illica and Giacosa.

Franchetti did not see anything in "Tosca" suitable to operatic composition (though Puccini found something in it worth while). Illica and Giacosa being mortified at Franchetti's

rejection of their work, made a bet with him that an impartial judge would find their libretto suitable. The bet, a good luncheon for all concerned, for which the loser was to pay, was unanimously referred to Verdi. The libretto was immediately sent to him, and Verdi was requested to decide whether it was a good one. In due time the luncheon took place, and when it was over, the master was asked his opinion. "I am more than satisfied," he said, "with the libretto. Indeed, I must congratulate the authors on their work. It is in every way suitable for composition as an opera. Were I not otherwise occupied, I might undertake it myself." Franchetti combatted the master's decision, and wished to go into details. "Look at the last act, Maestro," he said. "There you have a man about to die, and he is writing a letter. What sort of music would you write for that? Would it be something declamatory, something highly dramatic, or something meditative? Would it be an aria or an arioso?" Verdi looked up amiably, and a twinkle came into his eye: "For that situation, Franchetti, I should just write some music."

V

Many of Verdi's estimates of the composers of the last century are preserved. If the judgments of small masters concerning big ones are of little value; if the critics, according to a celebrated gibe, are those persons who have failed in literature and art; if more recklessly even than D'Israeli, we say that most critics, so far from being those who have failed in literature and art, are for the most part those who paled at the idea of attempting such exercises; then we must attribute to the verdicts of a man like Verdi, a genius at once creative and analytic, the highest value. His bias in music in general was in favor of the old purities. The tranquil and lucid beauties of the sonatas of Corelli extorted from him the remark, "And yet we have the presumption to say we have made progress in art!" His natural bent and fixed purpose were to do all in his power by a spoken word, actual example, and implied encouragement to keep Italian music entirely free from external influences, just as Hans Sachs in "Die Meistersinger" wished to see German art untainted by frivolous influences alien to its original and grave temper. Verdi regarded Italian composition as compromised, if not contaminated, by an aping of foreign modes that concluded in hybrid results of no logic or consistency and quite untraceable to any native or natural well of inspiration.

These things may readily be admitted, but to most minds they must reinforce rather than weaken the value of his judgments.

No one can understand Verdi unless he realizes that his artistic honor and probity were as stern and inflexible as they were unchallengeable. He speaks at all times from the cold heights of his principles, never from the marsh and welter of petty interests and the confusion of minor selfishnesses.

His general attitude towards the operatic composition of the day, he has stated with his usual clearness. No one should want, he urged, to be a melodist like Bellini, or a harmonist like Meyerbeer. He himself wished to be neither the one nor the other. He would like the young man, when he undertakes to write, not to think of being a melodist or a harmonist, or an idealist, or a futurist, or any of the "devils"—such being Verdi's vigorous expression—"implied by these pedantries." After all melodies and harmonies are nothing but means in the hands of artists—means for making music. One day nothing will be said of melody, of harmony, nor of Italian nor of French schools, nor of the past nor of the present, and the rest. Then, he prophesies, will begin a reign of art.

Another sign of the times, that came under his notice, was this, that operas had become the fruits of fear. No one writes freely and spontaneously, he complains. When the young start to compose, the thoughts that rule their minds are the hope of getting into the good graces of the critics and the dread of clashing with the ephemeral tastes and sympathies of the public.

He was aware in the "sixties" of "the music of the future." But he said dryly that he would always remember that shoes could not be made without leather. He confessed ironically that he was and would always be an admirer of the futurists on the condition that they wrote music. He did not mind the genus, nor the species, nor the system, nor the subdivisions, nor the nomenclature, as long as he found the music.

Now for particular instances: His views on Gounod have point at this time, when his own operas are showing a vitality far greater than that of his French contemporary. The popularity of "Faust" had the very natural effect of stimulating a mushroom crop of Italian imitators and Milanese Gounoddles. Verdi, deprecating this, took occasion to deliver himself on Gounod:

When our young men have assured themselves that it is needless for them to search for light either in Mendelssohn, in Chopin or in

Gounod, they will perhaps find the light. It is curious that the young should take for models of dramatic composition those composers that are not dramatic. You may be surprised that I speak to you in such a way of the author of "Faust." But what am I to say? Gounod is a great musician, the first master of France; but he has no dramatic sinew. The music is admirable and grateful, the details are magnificent, the word is nearly always well expressed. But let us quite understand one another. It is the word and not the situation that is well set forth.

His characters are not clearly designed. He lends no particular color to his drama or dramas. He writes chamber pieces, and instrumental pieces in a manner quite superior, and in a style all his own, but he is not an artist of dramatic fiber. Even "Faust," though it has succeeded, has become small in his hands.

The last phrase is merciless, damnatory. It may be brought forward in objection to it, that Gounod never undertook to deal with the greater issues of Goethe's sublime poem. But he did appropriate some of the ideas, and he did make use of the name of the philosophic tragedy with all its tremendous associations. If one is to judge by actualities and by results, and in the indicative and not the conditional mood, there is no escaping the ruthless and almost ferocious justice of Verdi's pronouncement, "Faust became small in Gounod's hands."

In the same way the episode of Francesca da Rimini, that has done more to put the wreath of immortality upon the stern, gloomy brows of the Divine Poet than any other score of lines he wrote, becomes small in the hands of the poetasters who have stolen it and mangled it. "As it was with Faust," went on Verdi the critic, "so it was with 'Romeo and Juliet,' and so it will be with 'Polyeucte.'" He engraves his characters badly. Do not accuse me of evil speaking. I am giving my opinion to a friend to whom I would not act the hypocrite."

In view of what I cite elsewhere as regards Verdi's idea of the music of the future, in the year 1868, it is well to give his mature opinion of Wagner, especially as he makes it clear that the term "futurist" has no reference to Wagner.

His music, remote as it is from our habits of feeling—I make a single exception of "Lohengrin"—is a music of blood and nerves. It is music that has the right to survive. He shows that he has an unusual sense of the patriotism of art. He has gone so far in his fetichism as to write to a pre-established programme. This pre-conception hurt him. For the rest the evil has not come from him, but rather from imitators.

The soberness and self-control of his own character were such as to make the hysterical and sentimental disorder of the stormy Berlioz something odious, and almost physically repulsive.

He referred to Berlioz the man, with emphatic bitterness. "He is an artistic madman, a person to be left alone"; then more vigorously still:

He is a scourge! So warped and ill-conditioned was his nature, that he would have reviled himself were he certain that such abuse would have hurt some one else. The celebrity he achieved was due in the main to the forces of his effective talents; but when he attained it, he showed no respect for those who had helped him, not even to Meyerbeer, who had been his benefactor, whom he requited with ingratitude.

And who can deny Verdi's estimate of Berlioz as a composer?

Rem acu tetigit. He has touched the matter with the sharpness of a needle, as the Romans used to say. Never was there such acuteness of critical discrimination.

The talents of Berlioz, says Verdi, were keen as they were abundant. He had a feeling and an instinct for orchestration. In many of its effects, he was a predecessor of Wagner. The Wagnerians do not agree with this. It is, however, true. In composition he had no self-government, no self-control. He lacked so, I must say, in the quiet equilibrium which produces a complete artistic result. He swerved this way and then that, and when he was doing that which was worthy of praise.

If the Italian composer's decision upon Gounod's "Faust" amounted to a sentence, this opinion of the self-willed and tumultuous Berlioz approaches the finality of an epitaph.

VI

It is sufficiently evident that he mistrusted the generality of modern music, for he often speaks of it in terms of boredom, sarcasm and irritation.

On the death of Giuseppe Mercadante, the composer of "Il Giuramento" and the director of the College of Music of San Pietro, Naples, Verdi was publicly offered Mercadante's position. He regarded it his duty to refuse the honor, but he bitterly regretted the necessity of doing so. "I am still able to write something," he said, "and it is better that I should." The date of the offer, it should be borne in mind, was 1870. Verdi went on to say:

It would be a pride and delight to me were it not at this moment a step backward to drill the pupils of the Conservatory in the grave, austere and yet lucid examples of the first fathers. I should have wished, so to speak, to place one foot on the past and the other on the future, for the music of the future has no fears for me. I should have told the students: "Practice the fugue, continuously, tenaciously, to satiety, so

that your hand becomes free and strong in the voluntary manipulation of notes. Thus you will learn to compose with security, to arrange your parts skilfully, to modulate without affectation. Study Palestrina, and a few of his contemporaries. Then take a leap to Marcello, and fix your attention especially upon his recitatives. Go to a few performances of modern operas, but do not let yourselves be carried away, either by their harmonical-instrumental beauties, or by the chord of the diminished seventh, the rock of refuge for all those who cannot compose four bars without half a dozen of these sevenths. Prosecute these studies, uniting to them a large literary culture." I would also say to the young: "Put your hand upon your heart, write; and granted an artistic nature, you will be composers. At all events you will not swell the mob of imitators, and sickly subjects (*ammalati*) who search, and do it well sometimes, but never find." As for song, I should choose the old styles of study united to modern declamation.

I hope you may find (as director) a man who is above all things learned and severe in his scholarship. License and errors in counterpoint are admissible and sometimes beautiful in the theatre, but not in the Conservatory. Return to the antique; it will be a progress.

Then again:

No studies in the moderns! This may seem strange; but I see so many works made nowadays as bad tailors make clothes on a model! . . . When the young composer has made strict studies, when he has formed a style for himself and has gained confidence in his own powers, he may very well study these works later on, if he thinks it useful, and he will not then be in danger of becoming an imitator. But it will be objected: who will teach the young person instrumentation and ideal composition? His head and his heart will attend to that.

Verdi does not make himself quite clear as to whom he means by the moderns. But his main intention seems to be that the moderns are not a basis for the studies for the young. No, Verdi does not state whom he regarded as the Stravinskys and Schoenbergs of forty years ago. But the warnings implicit in so many of his letters and sayings have been fully justified. We are now living in an era the music of which is inhumane.

He remarks in the former of the two letters that he can still do something. Now Verdi was always reticent even as regards friends of peculiar intimacy, as to his musical projects.

The something that he was composing was "Aida." It may be emphasized in view of the nonsense that is talked about the cessation of mental activities at certain ages, that Verdi was fifty-seven when he began the work which is perhaps the culmination of the Italian opera, and which shares with "Lohengrin" nowadays the widest extent of intelligent popularity.

Every one knows how the Khedive Ismail Pasha commissioned Verdi to write an opera which was to draw the attention of the cultivated world to the theatre which had been opened in the year of the formal completion of the Suez Canal.

Verdi hesitated at first, but the financial consideration was handsome. The generous Khedive had offered the princely sum of twenty thousand dollars for the manuscript. There were no harassing conditions. Ismail Pasha went no further than to express the hope that the opera should be Egyptian, and have a tinge of patriotism.

The music of "Aida" is so well known and so accessible that I shall not proffer a description of it. But the story of the formation of the libretto has a vivid interest for us, and a detailed study of that story would repay any one who wishes to write for the theatre. The prime reason for the failure of many operas resides in the fact that their writers have had no experience in writing for the stage; in giving musical ideas dramatic form; and rejecting musical ideas that are too vague or too pale to make any impression upon audiences, who, in the vast dimensions of a modern opera house, can grasp only a clear and emphatic design, whether of incident or music.

It is of course a platitude to say that Verdi was always dramatic. All composers who have established themselves in the form of opera have possessed the dramatic instinct. But Verdi was even more than dramatic. He had knowledge and experience of theatrics. I use this word in the sense of the science of that which is possible and valid in the theatre. When Verdi sat down to write "Aida" there were behind him thirty years devoted to the profession of writing for the stage, and twenty-seven operas, most of them failures, but every one of which, failure or success, was to contribute, positively or negatively, to his strongest, most logical, most impassioned, and in the broadest and best sense, most popular work.

We shall see later how alive he was to the peculiar exigencies of theatrical song, declamation and music, and as to the type of language suitable to opera. The libretto of "Aida" was the work of four minds.

Mariette Bey, the Egyptologist, conceived the story, and suggested certain historical allusions and details. Camille du Locle, one of the French librettists of "Don Carlos," wrote that which in theatrical parlance is called a scenario, that is, an extended description in prose of the action. Antonio Ghislanzoni, an Italian man of letters, for whose scholarship Verdi had the

profoundest respect, wrote the poem of "Aida" as we have it now. He also added on direction two scenes purely the product of the imagination of Verdi, the scene of the Judgment, and the tragic finale of the whole opera. Moreover, there is scarcely a page of Ghislanzoni's that Verdi has not corrected, amplified, or modified as regards language or as regards episode, all in deference to the stern exactions of the theatre. One is surely justified, then, in referring to Verdi himself as a fourth author of the book of "Aida."

In one of the letters to Ghislanzoni, Verdi lays down some laws for operatic composition, which librettists and composers should bind to their hearts. "Aida" was composed act by act, the music of the second being finished before the words of the third were in Verdi's hands. When he received the second act, he wrote to Ghislanzoni:

There are excellent things at the beginning and end of your duet, though it is too extended, too long. The recitative could have a less number of verses. The poetry goes well until, "A te in cor desta." But after that, when the action begins to warm and quicken, it seems to me that you lack in "scenic language." When I say scenic language, I do not know whether I make myself clear. But what I mean is language that strikes, language that makes the dramatic situation clear and salient.

Then he exemplifies. He takes the verse:

*In volto gli occhi affisami,
E menti ancor, se l'osi,
Radames vive.*

(Turn your eyes to my face,
Lie again, if thou darest,
Radames lives.)

And he says "This is less theatric than the words, ugly words, I admit":

*Con una parola
Strapperò il tuo segreto
Guardami t'ho ingannata.
Radames vive.*

(With a single word
Shall I pluck out thy secret,
Look at me. I have deceived thee,
Radames still lives.)

In the same way the verses, he goes on,

*Per Radames d'amore
Ardo e mi sei rivale
—Che "voi l'amate" —io l'amo
E figlia son d'un re."*

(With love for Radames
I burn, thou art my rival.
—What thou lovest him—I love him,
And I am the daughter of a king.)

seem less suited to the theatre than:

Tu l'ami ma l'amo anch' io, intendi? La figlia dei Faraoni e tua rivale! *Aida*. Mia rivale, e sia. Anchio io son figlia d'un re. (Thou lovest him. But I love him too, thou hearest. The daughter of the Pharaohs is thy rival! *Aida*. My rival! So be it. I, too, am the daughter of a king.)

Verdi then proceeds to lay down a daring canon:

You may say "what about the verse, the rime, the stanza?" I have no answer, but when the action demands it I would throw rhythm, rime and stanza to the winds. I would use blank verse so as to say clearly and sharply everything required by the action. Composers and poets writing for the theatre must have at time a genius for writing neither poetry nor music.

He obeyed this rule himself, and there is a striking example of his tact in "Otello." When he came to the justly celebrated scene in which Iago sows the seeds of suspicion and jealousy in Otello's mind, he could not conceive of any music that could characterize the conversation of the two, nor any that could reinforce a dramatic situation which is purely mental and interior, or in the theatrical jargon of the day a psychological one. Eliminate the scene he could not. It is absolutely necessary to the intelligibility of the action. "I must retain it," he said to Victor Maurel, "but I cannot make suitable music for it. Therefore I shall, for that scene at least, subordinate the music entirely to the words."

The character of Iago, as Shakespeare designed it, he knew, was not an operatic one. Its subtleties and refinements were hard or impossible to design in music, and he realized that the shades of expression which would convey to the audience the fact that Iago was not the honest, open and bluff soldier that every one took him to be would be lost in the great distances of an opera house. Therefore he made very striking alterations in Iago, so much so that Tommaso Salvini complained to him—Mr. Owen Johnson is my authority for the story—that his Iago was not Shakespeare's Iago at all. "In what respect?" said Verdi. Salvini mentioned the subtleties and the refinements I have referred to. "But you, Verdi, have made him a melodramatic villain with his Credos and his triumphant outcry of "Ecco il leone." "All that you say is perfectly true," said Verdi. "But it will

have to remain like that. It cannot be changed." This meant that he had fully calculated the cost of his laceration of Shakespeare, and that he knew he would be exposed to the censure of the judicious. This was his Scylla. His Charybdis was the calamity of putting an unoperatic character into an opera, of forgetting that the opera was a form of the theatre, but a form of the theatre in which many things theatrical were not possible. The point of all Verdi's remarks to Ghislanzoni, whether he is speaking of dramatic episodes, or the language in which they are couched, and that of his answer to Salvini is merely this, "In opera you must be graphic."

It is not a medium for verbal delicacies and dramatic adumbrations. It must be active, direct and impassioned.

The theatre, it should be remembered, is two things conjoined, as the very word "playwright" suggests. It is an art; but it is also a craft. No one knew this better than Verdi, and he also knew the point at which the opera and the theatre parted ways.

How deeply Verdi concerned himself in the literary side of "Aida" and to how large an extent he was the author and the imaginer of the musico-dramatic effects, as well as the composer of the piece, is worth establishing. He tells Ghislanzoni for instance that he wanted him to write a "piece" consisting of a litany intoned by the priestesses, to which the priests answered; a sacred dance with slow and melancholy music; of a short recitative, solemn and energetic like a psalm from the Bible and of a prayer in two strophes, said by the priest and repeated by all. It was to have a tranquil and pathetic character, especially in the first act in order to avoid any resemblance to the other choruses at the finale of the introduction and the second finale, which have a touch of the Marseillaise. Verdi actually postulates the number of syllables there are to be in certain lines.

VII

If to those who speak the English language Verdi has his peculiar attractions, these are his devotion to Shakespeare and his felicity in writing operas based on plays so entirely different as "Othello" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor." Verdi was with Shakespeare heart and soul, from the moment that he had an opportunity of studying him in the easy and flowing version of Carcano. Sidney Lee, the most recent biographer of Shakespeare, sees in the operas of Verdi the evidences of the "profoundest study" of the English poet. The free use that Shakespeare had

made of Italian originals was in itself sufficient to delight the heart and refresh the spirit of Verdi. His general estimate of Shakespeare he expressed as follows:

To copy the truth may be a good thing, but to invent it is much better. The words "to invent the truth" may seem to involve a contradiction, but look to the Father. (Verdi had actually referred to Shakespeare as the Father.) It may be admitted that he may have associated with a Falstaff or so, but never with a scoundrel as bad as Iago, and never, no never, with angels like Cordelia, Imogen, and Desdemona. And yet they are true and real. To copy the truth is a fine thing, but it is photography, not art.

Verdi, in other words, has laid his finger on the reason of Shakespeare's greatness. That poet invests the real with the majesty of the ideal.

The first Shakespearean opera of Verdi's was "Macbeth" (1847). It has never been able to stand its ground. The libretto of Piave was a pitiable parody of the tragedy. Yet it was not this misdemeanor, strange to say, that caused the Florentine police to interfere with it. Piave had thought proper to inject into the piece a feeble jingle having a somewhat vapid reference to topical political conditions, and this excited the nightly demonstrations of impressionable patriots.

The supremely tragical figure of King Lear could not fail to appeal to Verdi, and in 1856 he had already made a general design of the opera, as regards those scenes of Shakespeare which he should use, and had begun the selection of the singers. The Piccolomini was one of his choices for Cordelia. He decided, however, that the subject presented difficulties, especially in the matter of casting its interpretants, too great for him to overcome. He put aside the project, dear as it was to him, to return to it again and again with affectionate fascination even towards the end.

Maurel tells us that, as far back as 1866, Verdi had wished to write a "lyric comedy." He met with little encouragement from the managers and the project lay in abeyance for nearly a quarter of a century. Maurel in 1886 went to see Verdi, who in conversation revived the subject. "I have sought," said he, "a libretto in Molière and in the French plays of the day. I have found nothing which completely satisfies me." Maurel suggested a Shakespearean comedy. This interested Verdi; but as was his wont, he said little.

A few days afterward Maurel sent him a French version of "The Taming of the Shrew," which had been prepared for production by M. Coquelin.

Verdi confessed the attractiveness of the active and witty piece:

The comedy pleases me greatly. But to deal with it properly you need a Rossini or a Donizetti. Few modern composers would be content to efface themselves sufficiently in the setting of such a work. They are too much of harmonists, of orchestrists, to sacrifice themselves to the correct description of character, to the force and play of dramatic situations. I can only say now—wait.

Two years later, Maurel and Verdi were at Genoa in the Palazzo Doria. It was after supper, and Verdi was plunged in one of his reveries. He broke it to say, smiling, "Maurel, two years ago you caused me great anxiety." "What was it?" Maurel asked. "Well," replied Verdi, "you remember we were talking of a lyric comedy. You mentioned Shakespeare, and you were so emphatic, as to what might or might not be taken from his works, that I fear I have been guilty of an indiscretion, and one, moreover, that might be hard to explain."

Here Verdi hesitated. Maurel, of course, was burning to hear more. At last Verdi said, "I can tell you the secret now. Boito and I have planned an opera based on Shakespeare. It is almost done. It is called 'Falstaff'."

The name of Boito is indissolubly connected with Verdi's "Falstaff." He is that rare combination, a man of letters and a musician. He had already written the text for Verdi's "Otello," and under an anagram of his own name, Tobia Gorrio, that of "La Gioconda" for Amilcare Ponchielli. His "Falstaff" libretto is a triumph of ingenuity. With the deftness of a literary craftsman, he has combined certain of the incidents of "King Henry IV" with certain of those of "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

He did not touch heavily on the more sinister features of the witty sensualist, those which made Victor Hugo say of Falstaff, "Glutton, coward and brute, he walked on the four paws of disgrace." He has shown Falstaff as Queen Elizabeth asked Shakespeare to show him, in love.

After Maurel and other intimates, the country folk around Busseto were the first to discover the nature of the master's new work. They had read it on his face. The mood and temper of Verdi easily reacted to the nature of the work in which he was occupied. When he was engaged on "Otello" his general bearing reflected the tragic sternness of his thoughts. Later, when the country folk noticed that he was always in mirthful humor, they realized that he had changed from the grave style to the gay. Even the driver of the village hack, so Maurel tells us, had divined the nature of the new opera.

He had then wished for forty years to write such a work, and for fifty years he had known the "Merry Wives of Windsor." He had hesitated, he confessed, "confronted by the ever existent 'buts'." Boito, however, had smoothed away the obstacles, and had written for him a lyrical comedy that "resembled no other." This much soon became known, and Verdi was bombarded with inquiring and inquisitive letters. One reply, that to Checchi, is important:

More than the truth has been said about "Falstaff." Boito has written for me a "libretto buffo," comic, as is liked. It is something more than delightful, and I am enjoying myself in torturing it with notes. Nothing, or hardly any, of the music is written. When will it be done? Who knows? Shall I finish it? But—this is the pure, the real truth.

He did not answer all questions in so general a tone, although the very composition of the piece was wreathing the lips of the youth of eighty in smiles, and filling his grave spirit with radiance and delight.

Giulio Ricordi, his publisher, wrote to him in 1891, regarding the publication and production of the work. Verdi's answer was slightly angular, and he reminds his old friend, with something just a little less than sharpness, that he was old and could not work as he once could:

Now let us come to "Falstaff." All projects concerning it are folly, absolute folly. I set to work on "Falstaff" merely to pass the time. I had no preconceived ideas, no plans. I repeat I wanted to pass the time. Nothing else. So all the talk and all the propositions that are made to you, however vague, and all the words that may be dragged from you, will end in becoming pledges and obligations, which I refuse to assume. I have told you and I repeat it, "I write for a pastime." I have told you that the music is only half done. Let us understand each other—only half sketched, and the half remains the greater labor, the concerting of the parts, the work of readjustment and correction, and the instrumentation which will be most wearisome. To speak briefly, the whole of the year will not suffice to finish the work. Why then make plans and assume responsibilities even in vague terms? Moreover, if I found myself even in the slightest way tired, I would be no longer at my ease. I could do nothing well. When I was young, although my health was not good, I could stay at my desk ten and even twelve hours a day, and more than once I have worked from four in the morning until four in the afternoon, on a meal of coffee, and I worked without remission. Now I cannot. Then I was the master of my body and of my time. Now, alas, no longer! To conclude: It is better to say to every one now and later that I neither can nor will give the slightest word of promise as regards "Falstaff." If it will be, it will be, and what will be, will be.

All this goes very far towards destroying the theory that would have it that somehow or other Verdi in his later days was Germanized. One writer, apparently accepting the general proposition, hints that the process was accomplished through the means of the litterateur Boito. The view is fantastic. However valuable Boito may have been to Verdi as a librettist, a study of his "Mefistofele" and his incompleted "Nerone" is sufficient to make us certain that he, a composer almost *manqué*, could scarcely breathe musical inspiration into the soul of a great, original, and as "Falstaff" proves, an inexhaustible master. To force poor Boito into a contest with Verdi for the peculiar honors of "Otello" and "Falstaff" is to provoke a contest as rash and fatal as that which Marsyas at the instigation of the imprudent, undertook against Apollo.

Perhaps "Falstaff" has an intimate rather than a general appeal. Herein, it may resemble, let us say, the Essays of Montaigne. Montaigne is the reader's writer, as Shelley is the poet's poet. Exquisitely musical fabric as "Falstaff" is on all sides admitted to be, fine flower of the composer's genius as it is, its beauty is often satirical and literary, rather than, to the general public, urgent and explosive. The hero is not the tenor and the tenor is not the hero. This is to the everyday opera-goer unfamiliar and discomforting. It is a violation of time-honored principles and experiences.

Now "Falstaff" flies in the face of a number of conventions, these drastic provisions, as it does in the face of many similar regulations. This is the reason that it mystifies the multitude, who love simple, stereotyped love stories. Of course, "Falstaff" is a love story but a comic one, resulting in the ridicule of Falstaff and the exploiting of some of the most risible sides of his character, which is an amusing one, and a witty and human one, but the reverse of heroic. He could never be a tenor with a *simper* and a high *C*.

To students and devotees of Shakespeare the idea of an Italian musician, even of the powers of Verdi, undertaking to put Sir John Falstaff to music, savors of a mixture of the ludicrous and the terrible. Many, hardening their hearts in the acid of a prejudice not entirely unnatural, have refused or hesitated to listen to Verdi's last opera on this very ground. Others being among Shakespeareans a sort of Newtons have voyaged deliberately through so strange a sea of thought. They have found a gravitation of delight; for Verdi's "Falstaff" is the most Shakespearean thing to be found in the realms of music.

It is customary to say that the chief wonder of "Falstaff" is, that it was written by a man in his eightieth year. I do not think so. This is a platitude in any case, not to say a judgment rather physiological than artistic. The fact that a man of eighty wrote an opera is no reason for enjoying it. The extraordinary difference of style, tone, and design in "Falstaff" when compared with "Ernani" or "Don Carlos," for instance, is striking but not miraculous or unprecedented. No one, indeed, could divine that they were by the same man. But you might say exactly the same of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Timon of Athens," of "As You Like It" and "The Tempest"; of Turner's pictures painted under the influence of Claude Lorraine, and the sublimer imagination of "Ulysses Defying the Cyclops." Such progress, to use a stiff and schoolroom word, is normal. It is innocent to be surprised at it. Briefly put, the real marvel of "Falstaff" is the absolute concurrence of the music of Verdi with the spirit of Shakespeare's most English play. The peasant lad of the village of Pruning Hooks, associating his genius with that of the runaway of Stratford-on-Avon, has been as felicitous as Shakespeare in the portrayal of Sir John, the florid and buxom matrons of Thames side, and the pastoral beauties with their tinge of folk-lore, and picturesque superstition of Windsor Forest. This is the praise, and these the proper garlands of "Falstaff."

VIII

Towards the end of Verdi's life, 1892, an old foe, no less a person than Hans Von Buelow, made a pilgrimage to Canossa.

He had written fifty years before in Weimar an article which showed that he was fully alive to the distinctive merit of Verdi's style, the rich and inexhaustible fund of melody, as well as its theatrical effectiveness. Von Buelow had derived these impressions from "Ernani," an opera which in England and America has never achieved any startling popularity. But Von Buelow in addition to his interpretative gift had the faculty of apt and correct judgment.

But shortly after Von Buelow had expressed himself in this way, he caught Wagnerianism in its most violent form. Most of us know the symptoms. Most of us have had the fever which at its crisis involves the admiration of Wagner to the exclusion of every one else, and the driving of all other gods out of the Pantheon.

For defined, valuable and highly sensitive periods of our lives, we submit to a golden servitude to his will and ideas, a submission resembling in its unjust and unbalanced concentration that of a lover to his mistress. As the judgment broadens and sobers, some of the magic fetters fall away, and awaking from our happy trance, we can see beauty and light in other faces.

This was precisely the case with Hans Von Buelow. Verdi for a brief period was his Rosaline. But Wagner became his Juliet. His devotion to Wagner caused him not only to neglect the claims of Verdi, claims which he had already admitted in his Weimar article, but to refer to him in the public prints in terms of bitter artistic hostility. The attacks were slightly frenzied as one may imagine, with the *furor Teutonicus*. He contributed, for instance, to the *Allgemeine Zeitung* a caustic attack upon the Manzoni Requiem, and in other ways showed a contempt for Italian music. But the genius of Verdi is insinuating, self-imposing, and self-restoring. The time came when Von Buelow of his own accord did a voluntary act of complete penance. He wrote from Hamburg in these words:

Hamburg, 7 April, 1892.

Illustrious Master:

Will you consent to hear the confession of a contrite sinner? It is now eighteen years since the undersigned was guilty of a gross piece of journalistic stupidity, directed against the last of the five kings of modern Italian music.

(And oh! many times has he repented it, and been bitterly ashamed of it.) When he committed the error referred to,—perhaps in your magnanimity you may have entirely forgotten it—he was in a state of folly. Permit me to mention this circumstance, one which is, so to speak, extenuating. My understanding was blinded with an ultra-Wagnerian fanaticism. Seven years later, the light began to dawn gradually. The fanaticism was purified and became enthusiasm. Fanaticism is petroleum. Enthusiasm is electric light. The intellectual world calls for light, and justice. There is nothing more destructive than injustice. There is nothing more intolerable than intolerance, as your noble Giacomo Leopardi has said.—When I arrived at this point of knowledge how much I had to congratulate myself upon, how much my life has been enriched, and how widely has the field of precious artistic joys been enlarged. I have begun with the study of your last works, “Aida,” “Otello,” and the Requiem, a somewhat feeble performance of which lately moved me to tears. I have studied them not only to the letter which kills, but according to the spirit which brings life. And so, illustrious master, now I admire and love you. Will you then forgive me? Will you avail yourself of the privilege of sovereigns, the privilege of pardon? However it may be, I ought, as far as I can, even if it were only to set an example to lesser erring brothers, to confess

my fault of days gone by. And so, faithful to the Prussian motto "to each his own," I give the ringing cry, "Evviva Verdi, the Wagner of our dear Allies."

The comparison of fanaticism to the burning petroleum, which gives a dull glare and a thick, malodorous smoke, is a fine one, and full worthy of Von Buelow's literary and epigrammatic gift. Verdi replied:

Illustrious Master Von Buelow:

There is not even the shadow of wrong-doing in you. There is no reason to talk of repentances and absolutions. If your opinions at one period differed from your opinions of today, you have done well in making them clear. Nor have I ever dared to complain of them. For the rest—who knows, perhaps you were right! However that may be, this unexpected letter of yours, written by a musician of your value and of your importance in the artistic world, has given me great pleasure. Not indeed because of my personal vanity, but because I realize that artists of the better kind form their judgments without the prejudices of school, nationality, or epoch.

If the artists of the North and South have different tendencies, let them be diverse. Wagner has said excellently, that all men should preserve the proper characteristics of their nationality. You may be happy that you are still the children of Bach. And we? We are indeed the children of Palestrina, and once we had a noble school. But it has today become spurious and bastard, threatening ruin. If we could only begin all over again.

Your sincere admirer,

GIUSEPPE VERDI.

There is nothing in this letter, which in reserve and dignity is characteristic of its writer, except for the mild irony of the phrase, "I have never dared to complain," to prove that German criticism had stung or irritated the circle of Verdi's friends.

That it had done so is perhaps indicated, even though vaguely, by the note of triumph that one seems to observe, in a remark of Arrigo Boito's. He had seen a copy of Verdi's answer to Von Buelow. Giulio Ricordi had shown it to him. "Bravo, master," he cried. "This is most beautiful and most noble! You have the secret of the correct tone, at the correct moment. This is the great secret of art and of life."

IX

It was considered clever a few years ago and it may be still, to say that in his later years Verdi was strongly influenced by Wagner. The remark, heedlessly made, has been passed on

unchallenged and by dint of constant repetition it begins to wear the semblance of truth, or at least truth enough to serve for the half-learned chatter of musical lecturers and aesthetic clubs. But a short consideration of Verdi's earlier operas will show that there is nothing in the last of his works that is not foreshadowed in those "melodramas," as he himself delighted to call them, which he wrote at the period when his style was no longer tentative, but so fixed, individual and widely recognized that the adjective "verdiano" and its inflections had become part of the Italian language.

I refer to "Rigoletto," "Il Trovatore" and "La Traviata." These were written and produced within a few months of each other, while the composer was in his early forties. Those who hold that Verdi was Wagnerized have made much of the character-drawing in lines of music and action of the personages of Iago and Falstaff.

Yet Azucena in "Il Trovatore" is just as boldly and clearly delineated. Its dramatic fervor, musical logic and pictur-
esqueness are indisputable.

The solemn and pathetic prelude to the last act of "La Traviata" has the musico-philosophic attribute of establishing in the mind of its hearers the mood of receptivity for the scenes of pity and of sorrow to follow it. The whole last act of "Rigoletto" is in the spirit, if not in the letter, of the music-drama, because the music in practically every number either arises naturally from the action or assists or illustrates its progress. The quartet "Bella figlia" may serve for an instance of this. It is dramatic, first negatively, because, though a piece of concerted music, it does not clog or harass the movement of the story. It is dramatic positively and to a degree of poignancy, because it describes the contrasted emotions of four distinct persons, each of whom is to play a different and necessary part in a denouement of blood and doom. At the same time its music, absolutely considered, flatters and commands the ear with the beauty of its flowing melody, the strong pulse of its rhythm, and the freedom and strength of its construction. Even the Abbé Liszt had to succumb to these virtues, and he transcribed the number for his piano and the general if artificial delectation of his audiences.

The broad musicianship, the generous and capacious vocal effectiveness of "Aida" are anticipated in "Il Ballo in Maschera," wide as is the river of time that separates the two. One cannot therefore be surprised at the skill and appositeness of the fugue in "Falstaff" when one remembers the quartet in "Rigoletto."

One is not astonished at the fruit, when one has seen the promise of the bud and the fragrance of the blossom.

Mr. Walter Damrosch tells me he cannot find in the music of Verdi even the trace of a citation or an imitation of the music of Wagner.

One external and non-musical influence was certainly brought to bear on Verdi and must have helped to make him what he became. In the very noon of his life he saw his country fight her way from discord and servitude into the power and majesty of national freedom. The play of political movements on the artistic spirit is something subjective and obscure; but we know it to be actual and energetic. We have the testimony of Wordsworth to the emotions stirred and the changes wrought in him by the French Revolution, when "the antiquated earth beat like the heart of man." In Verdi's days the antiquated earth of Italy beat once again like the heart of man. Her eternal leaven was working once again. She was laboring for a new birth. Verdi lived when it was worth living, in the mighty blaze of great events. It was not his harp that sounded in slavery.

The Italians of half a century ago soon realized that the art of Verdi was universal yet native; eloquent to the whole world, and yet sprung from their own soil. He was of them. He had appeared at a moment of national eclipse but he continued the epic of their race. So Verdi appealed at once to the tenderness and to the pride of his compatriots. There had been born in a city at no great distance from Busseto an Italian poet, whose verses have lingered on the lips of men for centuries and whose name has acquired a sort of sanctity. But the grave and stately Mantuan had based his poetry upon Ionian and Sicilian models, while the lyre of Verdi, while reviving the lustre of Italian song, was spontaneous, underived, indigenous. So the Italians identified Verdi with the assertion of their artistic and intellectual claims upon the opinion of Europe and with the resurrection of their country. His homely name became a battlecry.

Action and reaction were equal and complete. The poet answered to the incentive of this impassioned gratitude and went forward mentally, morally, and consequently artistically, with the march of his nation.

"Anch' io pugnai per la patria!" "I, too have fought for my country!" shouts Amonasro in the scowling faces of foreign tyrant and the ministers of established superstition. And what Italian does not thrill at the lofty defiance of this glowing and allusive passage?

Such I feel were the only exterior forces to contribute to the expression of Verdi's innate artistic powers. Their action was of course general rather than specific.

Musically he was self-contained and self-developed. The theory that he was transformed by Wagnerism, filtered through Arrigo Boito, is not supported by evidence. If Verdi was under no debt to Wagner, he had a very clear appreciation of the sense and logic of many of Wagner's corrective ideas. These he must have followed with careful observation. He writes from Genoa on the eve of one of his productions:

I have been considering the question of the disposition of the orchestral players for a whole winter in Genoa, and have come to the conclusion that such arrangements have an importance as regards the blending, sonority and effect of the instruments far greater than generally believed. Small meliorations in this kind will open the way to quieter innovations which were bound to come. How can people find it otherwise than intolerable to see the mass of the orchestra *which is part of the region of illusion* in the middle as it were, of the pit of the theatre amid the gathering of applauders and hisserers? Add to this the grave detriment of seeing the heads of the harps and the handles of the contra-basses, and the baton twirlings of the conductor.

The innovation that was bound to come and to which he referred was Wagner's invisible orchestra. "The idea," he exclaims, "is Wagner's, and it is splendid!"

The idea is undoubtedly splendid, but I do not know of an Italian theatre or even an American one that has adopted it.

An invisible orchestra implies an invisible conductor—that, in view of the modern exploitation of the conductor, is almost unthinkable.

X

The music of Verdi is a part of the lives of our own generation and the two that preceded us. There is indeed much of it,—the greater part of it in fact,—that is destined to be forgotten. But on the other hand there are many even of Verdi's older works that will have a life beyond life.

As the years roll on, we find that memories and associations almost consecrated by the tender grace of a day that is gone, begin to cluster about a song or an opera whose fashion has become old in the same way ivy gathers about the ruins of some broken or deserted tower. To enjoy this St. Martin's summer of perhaps sentimental favor has been the amiable lot of "Il Trovatore,"

recently revived in New York amid the most prosperous conditions. We found ourselves, even the oldest and the most self-assertive of us, even the youngest and the most progressive of us, yielding woman-wise to its full vein of amorous sentiment, and if to nothing else to that suave and romantic melodism which appealed so strongly to the younger Lord Lytton that he wrote a poem testifying to the melting power of those words, fledged with music—"Non ti scordar di me."

It was an old custom to preserve rose leaves, mingled with some other fragrant essences, in a bowl and have it about one's sitting-room. One would turn these withered petals over in one's hand and wonder in what fair garden their blossoms had bent to the sun or what white hand had once held them.

Well, so it was with "*Il Trovatore*" preserved and revived. Though many laughed, all listened, while the old airs set some to turning over in their minds the faded petals of those highly scented flowers in tone, so that some old memories returned and old faces were seen mistily.

All this may seem at first sight far away from the domain of esthetic criticism, but it is not.

The real virtue of any art lies in its humanity. Here is an opera that has two lives, one independent, the other associative. Resident in its creator, then, there must have been some especial force. That force I hold to be humanity, human-ness. Art after all cannot be anything else than nature passed through the heart and hand of an artist.

Verdi must be regarded as the most human and natural of composers. He insisted, be it remembered, on the principle that the human voice was the most expressive and dramatic of musical instruments, and the most persuasive or imperious musical means of reaching and dominating our emotions. Knowing what we may call the musical physiology of the voice to its last fact, having learnt by vast technical experience where lay the actual, theatrical and emotional effectiveness of each range of voice, he wrote for it as none has ever written for it since, inspiring equally his singers and their listeners. All this is in proof of what has been said of his human-ness. It was his instinct to rely as far as possible on humanity rather than on mechanism, or intellectual trick. So he realized in his own sphere the truth of the mighty and neglected utterance that man is the measure of mankind.

John Milton said that the ideal of poetry was that it should be "simple, sensuous and passionate." This is the exact description of Verdi at his best and most characteristic.

One likes to linger over thoughts of this Italian, the force and dignity of his character, the equipoise of his good sense, and the overflowing treasury of beauty that he has brought into the lives of the humblest and the haughtiest.

The occasion and epoch of his birth and life were so stirring and unusual, and certain elements so strangely mixed in him that there never will be one quite like him, Mankind regards him as something pleasantly familiar, arousing personal affection and many valued recollections.

He stands alone—Giuseppe Verdi.